
LESSON 3

THEORY OF UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE

Introduction

Purpose	The purpose of this lesson is to provide an overview of the importance of unconventional warfare and its impact on the strategy and methods the U.S. military has used to fight previous wars.
Why Study Theory of Unconventional Warfare?	You should study theory of unconventional warfare because we must retain much of the U.S. military's institutional memory of its experience fighting unconventional wars on our western frontier, in the Philippines, and during the Banana Wars in the Caribbean.
Relationship to Other Instruction	The evolution of OOTW doctrine is important in the light of current U.S. involvement in humanitarian/peacekeeping operations. This lesson serves as a practical example for warfighting in Third World countries like Somalia, Haiti, and possibly Cuba. This lesson is a follow-up to the other aspects of unconventional warfare that the course has addressed already: Insurgency, "Gray Area Phenomena" (GAP), Terrorism, and Counterinsurgency.
Study Time	This lesson, including the issues for consideration, will require about 2.5 hours of study.

Educational Objectives

Unconventional Military Doctrine	Analyze the evolution of U.S. unconventional military doctrine from the Vietnam War to the present. [JPME Area 2(b)]
Heritage in Modern Unconventional Warfare	Discuss the U.S. military heritage in modern unconventional warfare. [JPME Area 1(a)]
Limitations of U.S. Conventional Strategy	Explain the limitations of U.S. conventional strategy, doctrine, and force structure in selected OOTW scenarios. [JPME Areas 1(a) and 2(a)]
Political, Operational and Tactical Components	Interpret the political, operational, and tactical components of successful and unsuccessful strategies and doctrines associated with a historical experience in unconventional and counterinsurgency/guerrilla warfare. [JPME Area 3(d)]
JPME Areas/ Objectives/Hours (accounting data)	1/a/0.5 2/a/0.5 2/b/0.5 3/d/0.5

Discussion

U.S. Intervention in Vietnam When the U.S. military entered the Vietnam War, it did so with the same strategy and doctrine used in World War II and Korea. With the exception of the Army Special Forces and the Marine Corps Combined Action Platoon (CAP) program, U.S. forces were limited to a conventional strategy, doctrine, and force structure. This was the case despite a wealth of direct and indirect experience obtained in a long historical series of unconventional conflicts.

Loss of Institutional Memory Usually, the first thing that comes to mind is the USMC *Small Wars Manual*. It was published in 1940, just in time to become a casualty of Pearl Harbor and the legendary amphibious assaults conducted at Tarawa, Saipan, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and Inchon. Actually, despite the 1940 publication date of the *Small Wars Manual*, much of the U.S. military's institutional memory regarding its wealth of experience fighting unconventional wars on the Western Frontier, in the Philippines, and during the Banana Wars in the Caribbean, had already been lost as a result of World War I, the largest conventional conflict in U.S. military history up to that time. In that sense, World War II and Korea only completed a process begun in World War I.

Counter-Insurgency After World War II and Korea, the British wrote (or rewrote) the textbook on counterinsurgency (CI) warfare during the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960). This textbook was used and confirmed during the American and Filipino CI campaign against the "Huks" in the Philippines (1946-1954).

Further, the French obtained unconventional warfare experience during the First Indochina War from 1945-1954 and in the Algerian War (1954-1962) and in other lesser, but similar conflicts that have flared up around the globe. These experiences should have provided cautionary examples for American policymakers in Vietnam.

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Discussion, Continued

Strategy and Doctrine During the Vietnam (Second Indochina) War

Despite these numerous and available historical case studies, U.S. strategy and doctrine during the Second Indochina War paid little heed to a wealth of historical experience related to unconventional warfare. Little or no attention was given to earlier Japanese and French defeats in Indochina.

Political and military leaders alike assumed that superior U.S. technology and firepower could handle any problems posed by "inferior" Vietnamese regular or guerrilla forces--we would show the French how to do it! Recent lessons and insights from Malaya and the Philippines were only partially understood and haphazardly applied in South Vietnam.

Operational and tactical lessons learned from the American experience with the Seminoles, Geronimo, Pancho Villa, and Sandino were long forgotten, but they would not have been deemed appropriate if they had been remembered.

American Revolutionary War

Far too many Americans have misunderstood the American national experience in our own war for independence, the American Revolutionary War. This was (and still is) true because we have been victimized by our own cultural myths regarding the history, and therefore the nature, of that war. The myth emphasizes the role of American conventional warfare by conventional armies (American and French) at the expense of understanding the conflict's unconventional political and military dimensions.

Consequently, we focus on Washington's Continental Army, which was later reinforced by Rochambeau's French army and assisted by Admiral de Grasse's squadron of French warships in the battle of Yorktown.

We focus on conventional battlefield victories--Trenton, Princeton, Saratoga, and Yorktown and on battlefield defeats and pay too little attention to "the other war" (to borrow a phrase from Vietnam) that played an equal if not more important role in wearing down the will of Britain's people and government to continue the fight.

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Discussion, Continued

Counter- Insurgency/ Guerrilla Conflicts

We commonly fail to understand that the American Revolutionary War was "Britain's Vietnam" just as Lebanon in 1982-1985 became "Israel's Vietnam," and Afghanistan more recently became "Russia's Vietnam." The individual lists of reasons for failure in each of these "Vietnams" (including our own) share recurring themes.

As you look to the future, you would do well to look to the past to understand (for example) the hows and whys of the Marine Corps' approach toward counterinsurgency/guerrilla conflicts.

Important factors revealed through this approach were lack of personnel and firepower, and being compelled to adapt to tropical Caribbean terrain during the Banana Wars. The Marines quickly learned that conventional doctrine did not fit the reality of guerrilla warfare, and they recorded their hard-earned lessons in the *Small Wars Manual*, which served as a doctrinal source for counterinsurgency operations. Some Marine officers who fought Sandino in the Banana Wars later put their unorthodox tactics to use against the Japanese in the Pacific.

This doctrinal flexibility was again demonstrated by the Marine Corps in Vietnam under the Combined Action Platoon (CAP) Program, which incorporated native troops into its counterinsurgency operations just as it previously had incorporated the *Guardia Nacional* in Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic and the *Gendarmerie* in Haiti.

In spite of numerous advances in technology and firepower, there are still important strategic, operational, and tactical lessons to be learned from a wide range of unconventional wars: the Peninsular War (1808-1814), the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), the American 'Small Wars' of the 1920s and 1930s, and numerous revolutionary and counterinsurgency conflicts since World War II.

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Discussion, Continued

Doctrinal Flexibility

As you look to the future, you also need to consider seriously the issue of doctrinal flexibility. A "one-size-fits-all" approach was, and is, a formula for disaster. We must never forget the reasons why we were successful in the Persian Gulf War against Iraq. Since World War II, emphasis on conventional, high-technology warfare has not been an appropriate response to fighting low-level conflicts in remote Third World areas.

While this strategy worked well in Europe, Korea, and Iraq, it floundered in Vietnam. As a result of Vietnam, the Army created and expanded its Special Forces, Civil Affairs, and psychological operations (PSYOPS) capabilities to deal with future unconventional scenarios.

Summary

In conclusion, recent patterns in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia indicate that, at least for the near future, OOTW (and the conflicts and situations which lead to them) will continue to make demands on the mental and physical resources of U.S. Armed Forces.

Since OOTW possess moral, political, and military (both actual and potential) characteristics and dynamics similar to those which governed the wide range of unconventional conflicts addressed in this lesson, you would be well-advised to consider how many lessons and insights from these conflicts pertain to modern-day OOTW and how they can be applied to new situations.

Required Readings

Operations Other Than War (OOTW) Readings wKrepinevich, Andrew. "Counterinsurgency--American Style." *The Army in Vietnam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1986, Volume I, pp. 275-295. Find this reading in the *Operations Other Than War (OOTW) Readings*, Annex C, pp. C- to C-. Krepinevich identifies America's shortcomings in counterinsurgency during the Vietnam War. Krepinevich revisits the Korean War for examples of proper joint command.

wHerring, George. "Reflecting the Last War: The Persian Gulf and the Vietnam Syndrome." *Journal of World Studies*. Fall, 1993, Volume I, pp. 296-309. Find this reading in the *Operations Other Than War (OOTW) Readings*, Annex C, pp. C- to C-. Herring explains how Vietnam profoundly influenced the way that we, as a nation, look at the tumultuous events there long after the end of the Vietnam experience. Vietnam affected our view of the Persian Gulf crisis in August 1990. Herring cautions we should not assume that a victory in the Persian Gulf means we could win a Vietnam-like conflict today.

Joint Pub Readings Joint Pub 3-07, *Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War*, pp. II-1 to II-8. Find this reading in the *Joint Pub Readings* Vol. III (8800), pp. 829 to 836. The article delineates the following six MOOTW principles: objective, unity of effort, security, restraint, perseverance, and legitimacy.

For Further Study

Supplemental Readings

The readings listed are **not** required. They are provided as recommended sources of additional information about topics in this lesson that may interest you. They will increase your knowledge and augment your understanding of this lesson.

wTilford, Earl H. Jr. *Setup: What the Air Force Did in Vietnam and Why*. Maxwell AFB, Alabama: Air University Press, 1991.

wBeckett, Ian F.W. and Pimlott, John eds. *Armed Forces and Modern Counterinsurgency*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985.

Issues for Consideration

**U.S. Military
Involvement in
Vietnam**

What problems concerning U.S. military involvement in Vietnam are highlighted in the article "Counterinsurgency American-Style"?

**U.S. Victory in
the Gulf War**

What danger caused by U.S. victory in the Gulf War is anticipated in George Herring's article?